ICARC NEWSLETTER

December 2025

Thanks go to the ARRL Foundation for it's support of ICARC's future tower and repeater upgrades at it's remote site

Officers for 2026:
President – Bill Robinson, KC3ZAF
Vice President - Joe Rougeux, KD3bcw
Treasurer - Chris Edwards, N3VFK
Secretary - Larry Freeman, N3LT

Additional Board Members for 2026
1. Craig Bigler, AB3XA
2. Cass Fitzgerald, N3FLO
3. Ralph Timblin, N3UDI
4. Phil Kopczyk, K3PJ
5. Elmer Sorisio, KB3WG

Note: All officers are Board of Directors Members

A "Nut Shell" SUMMARY OF LOCAL HAPPENINGS OVER THE PAST YEAR, 2025

January: Initial steps taken to implement the $24,630 grant awarded to ICARC by the ARRL Foundation
Checking account set up for grant funds at the First Commonwealth Bank in Indiana, PA
First contacts with a crane company to remove the old tower. First contacts finding repeaters.

Winter Field Day (Setup Jan 24 with ops on 25, 26 with take down on Jan 26). Used a novel folded dipole ant for 160m-10 m, G5RV, and 40m-10m end fed. There were 15 participants with 9 operators on three different stations covering 6 bands. A total of 327 contacts which was 56 more than the year 2024. The total included 60 cw contacts.

February: A second Grant committee meeting was held on 2/25/2025. All major activity was focused upon obtaining quotes and equipment for the grant.

March: Rhine Rd. site was prepared for tower removal on March 8, 2025. There were six volunteers for the project and much was accomplished.

Last Saturday Event: The Ghost Town Trail (GTT) Propagation Study.
The event came off very well on March 29, 2025 The participants were, Phil Kopczyk (K3PJ), Craig Bigler (AB3XA), Cass Fitzgerald (N3FLO), Dave Dzelsky (N3DZ), Bill Robinson(KC3ZAF), and Larry Freeman (N3LT). Details are provided in the March 2025 Newsletter; see the photo later within this document. The intent was to test the viability of unbroken communications throughout the trail route along an approximate 19 mile section, on the ground, between Josephine, PA and Vintondale, PA. HF and vhf stations, fixed, mobile (vehicular) and portable (handhelds). Both simplex and repeater operation (N3FLO & W3BMD) were checked out. Net control was set up at Dilltown, the approximate center of the trail section with both, independent, hf and vhf/uhf capability. In addition three mobile hf

/vhf stations were setup: one near Vintondale/Rexis, one near Heshbon, and two near Josephine.

The third formal meeting of the ICARC Grant Committee happened on 03/25/2025. There were also two grant subcommittee meetings (03/01/2025, and 03/18/2025). Several major decisions have been made and some equipment has been ordered so things are starting to accelerate.

April: Mr. Joe Rougeux passed the Technician class examination at the April 19 testing session sponsored by the ARRL, ICARC, and the Indiana County Emergency Management Agency at their site.

The Last Saturday Event was another successful event that was interesting and a great teaching event for several members of ICARC. A total of nine people showed up and at least five of those did some soldering and six of us did some eating. Tables and E-Z ups were erected and soldering of connectors to coax commenced. Great Fun!

The fourth and fifth formal meeting of the ICARC Grant Committee happened on 04/22/2025 & 04/29/2025 , respectively. Several major decisions were made and tower equipment was ordered.

May:

May 17, Mr. Ian Bigler passed the Amateur Extra class examination at the 2025 Hamvention testing session sponsored by the ARRL.

May 20, New Kenwood repeaters for VHF and UHF were delivered by West Com Wireless.

June: June 27, the old tower was removed and the same day, the new tower was put in place. Later in the afternoon, preparation for Field Day was carried out at Blue Spruce Park.

Last Saturday event: ARRL Field Day: June 28 & 29 were operational days that were very productive. (See the article: **ICARC Hosts Annual Amateur Radio Field Day at Blue Spruce Park**, by Nathan Zisk in the June 30 addition of the Indiana Gazette.)

Completion of another successful operation for the ARRL Field Day at Blue Spruce Park by ICARC. Operating 3A under the W3BMD call sign, there was a final total of 375 contacts logged. There were ten operators spread through 80, 40, 20, 15, and 10 meters.

It was a fairly expansive operation with three stations and and five available antennas. One being a vertical. There were two stations on the large ball field near the main entrance and one located across the small pond that splits the park. Full operations started a bit late due to a deluge of rain around 1:45 to about 2:30 PM so we were a bit late getting started at the two ball-field sites which had EZ-up cover only. However the site across the pond was up and running at or near 2:00 PM because there was full tent cover from the deluge. Additionally, something new was tried this year in that the wire antennas used rope support along the full length of the antennas (Messenger Lines). The main benefit being the ability to attain greater height at the feed point for each of the dipole antennas which were used. The antennas allowed us to cover all hf bands between 160 m and 10 m.

July: Major "old tower" cleanup activity on July 2, 4, 5, & 6 involving tower section separation, removal of guy wires and coaxial cable.

On July19, there was a buzz of activity culminating in the digging of 3 holes at the site in preparation for stabilizing the new tower with permanent guy lines. The work started on the site July 2 continuing through July 4, 5, & 6 ending with locating and marking the anchor positions. The initial work started on July 2 removing the old guy wires from the downed tower, taking the old tower apart, moving and organizing the sections “out of the way”. Then after some bad weather and recuperation time; on July 19 work was done to clean out trees and brush in the “jungle” behind the repeater building to clear a

path for the back hoe and eventually the cement truck. Once the cleaning had been done, the digging started and after a very long day there were three holes dug with one, unfortunately, containing a large boulder protruding into it. Throughout this activity in July, there were eleven individual ICARC members involved in the cleaning of brush, cutting of trees, marking the hole locations and the digging . It was a major team effort more details provided in the July, 2025 ICARC Newsletter.

On July 26 there was another another "Last Saturday" event in which several club members participated in fabricating a simple dipoles for hf communications along with the necessary feed line in order to set up a couple of stations and make contacts. For practical reasons, the allowed bands were restricted 20, 15, and 10 meters due to limited space available for erecting and using multiple antennas, simultaneously. The individuals supplied their own radio equipment. Band choice was first come first serve. Ralph Timblin chose 20 m, Bill Robinson was on 15 m and Ian Bigler was on 10 m. There were other folks there to help get the antennas into the air. There were nine total participants. It was a fun day! (See the July Newsletter for more details)

The final event for July occurred on the 30th when a team of 9 folks got together and worked at fabricating the metal cages to go into the holes to reinforce the eventual concrete. Several club members worked at cutting and bending the steel rebar for the cages; Dave Steiner fabricated a bending jig that made the job go much easier than it could have. There were five ICARC members working at the site for this project. (Again more details are contained within the July Newsletter)

August: The days of August 6, 15, 21, 22, & 26 were very busy getting ready for the concrete anchors. Those days involved fabricating forms for the eventual concrete tower anchors, removing large rocks from a couple of the holes, using a hydraulic jack hammer, marking and setting the anchor rods at the appropriate positions and angles. The work ended on the 26th with getting the concrete poured and covered. A concrete pad was also poured as a front step for the ham shack on site.

Also on August 16, 2025 Hot dog night at the remote site was restarted with 13 folks showing up. It is scheduled for each first and third Saturday of the month, weather permitting.

On August 30 our"Last Saturday" event culminated the anchor installation with driving three 8 ft. anchor rods; one for each guy wire. This was done by Craig Bigler and Mike Kosalko using an electric impact hammer drill. There were a total nine individual ICARC members involved with the tower work through the month of August. The August, 2025 ICARC Newsletter contains considerably more detail than summarized here.

Also the 2m antenna was temporarily mounted on a short metal pole, and the 146.655/.055 was made operational with limited coverage.

September:

September 13, 27, and 30 were work days at the remote site.

Eight members of ICARC met at the remote site and covered the concrete with dirt to normal grade. In addition the hard line feeder cable was tested for operation at 449 MHz and showed near normal loss and good swr characteristics with 25 watts put into it with a 50 ohm dummy load and a Bird Watt meter attached.

There was also tower work which involved the members cleaning old aluminum hardware (primarily long tubes, and flat Plates) and testing another section of 1/2” Andrews heliax (hard line) coax. ICARC members also spent much time preparing the twelve guy wire ends to attach to the tower and anchors.

September 6th & 20th, the second and third hot-dog nights occurred.

October:

October 2, the first session of tower climbing occurred when the Climber, Stephen Lowther,was able to affix two tower brackets; one at the 28 ft level and the other at the 55 ft level. In addition he was able to get six guy wires mounted. The climber was on the tower for 5 hours. There was a five member ground crew on site who had everything ready for the tower climber.

October 4, another "Hot Dog" night occurred and it was spectacular.

October 6, two club members traveled to Kittanning to get the 20 ft aluminum pipe for use as a center pole for the tower top.

October 14, another grant committee meeting (8th) with the main objective to decide about batteries, and duplexers.

October 16, the Tower Climber, put the 20 ft top pipe, along with the static brushes and long ground cable onto the tower. The brush is currently about 5 ft above the top of the tower. It will be raised later if deemed necessary. The tower climber was on the tower for 4 hours. There was a five member ground crew to help with this work.

October 18, there was a VE exam session held at the Indiana County Emergency Management Agency sponsored by ICARC and the ARRL. There was also another "Hot Dog" night later in the evening.

November:

November 1, another "Hot Dog" night.

November 6, two antennas were mounted on tower and tested. A fault (high SWR) was found with the transmit antenna. The climber was on the tower for 3 hours. Four ground crew members were available to assist in the operation..

November 12, the faulty transmitter antenna had to be removed an repaired
For ease of repair and safety, the entire assembly was lowered to the ground. Fault determined to be a loose set screw at one joint inside the transmit antenna explained the problem.
high SWR. High wind prevented remounting the antenna the same day. The climber was on the tower for 2 hours. There was a three person ground crew assisting the climber.

November 23, the 2m transmitter antenna was repaired, tested, and reinstalled onto the structure at ground level. The structure was raised and the antenna again tested. Hard line secured and a final system test. All checked out well. This was the final tower climb work until Spring.

December:

December 4, there was the 9th meeting of the grant committee to discuss and decide final purchases for the remote site renovation. Also, the ARRL allowed for a four month extension to the grant. This provides time to do additional tower work in reasonably good weather.

December 11, the duplexers were delivered to ICARC personnel.

Regular outdoor events have been canceled due to poor weather through the Winter months.

Pledges to the Grant Fund by ICARC Members: $1720.00, Collected to date: $1400.00

Announcements:
Remember the upcoming ICARC meetings on Tue, Jan 6, 2026, and Feb 3, 2026, 6:30 pm at the Indiana, PA Eat 'n Park Restaurant. Also it is time for membership renewal, therefore, for your convenience, the final page of this document is a membership form. One may also renew via PayPal from the W3BMD website.

The video links for the old tower take down are given below:
Links for Tower Take-down
Courtesy of Deryl Mack , KC3YZW
https://youtu.be/c1LG7SRu9b0
https://youtu.be/risblzrA_hY
https://youtu.be/zCV7vwqTMjk

Another Interesting Mode of Operation on the Rise:
There is a newer, digital weak signal mode of operation that that seems to be catching on:VARAC
It is a interesting mode in that unlike FT-8 and other modes it can ALMOST be conversational in that you can communicate keyboard-keyboard by typing your message and sending it as soon as you are done typing. There is no timed structure to the sequence. I suspect that many of you who do a good bit of FT-8 and FT-4 may be familiar with this. In any case take a look at the home page, you may find it interesting too. I've downloaded it but not yet tried it. Explore the home page at: https://www.varac-hamradio.com/

Reminder: The ICARC Public Service and Information Net happens each Monday night starting at 8:30 PM using the W3BMD repeater on 146.910/146.310 MHz. (ICARC is an ARRL affliated club). There will often be a "Rag-Chew" net starting immediately following the primary net with the W3BMD/2 repeater, on 146.655/.055 MHz located at ICARC's Remote site. (Tones for both are 131.8 Hz)

Reminder: The ICARC meetings are, generally, scheduled for the FIRST Tuesday of each month.

Current Net Control Operators: Phil Kopczyk, Chris Edwards, Stuart Younkin, and Ralph Timblin. We thank you fellows very much. We can always use more.

Attention Technician and General licensees (and prospective hams), have you thought about upgrading? Do you have trouble making it to an in-person ham exam? Now you don't have that excuse. Groups holding online ham exams have greatly expanded. Some groups are having exams daily. Reportedly it is an easy process if you have a laptop, desktop or tablet with a camera and microphone. Below are websites where you can look into testing online.

https://wm7x.net/ One of the most popular. They have videos explaining how it's done.
https://kl7aa.org/vex/remote-testing/
https://hamstrung/sessions/remote Lists remote and in person test sessions.

No Minutes are available from the November ICARC Meeting

ICARC Minutes Dec 2, 2025
Attendance: AB3XA, N3VFK, N3LT, KA2YOS, K3PJ, N3ARA, KC3ZAF, KB3WG,W3CDH, N3UDI,WB3DUD, K3VAR, KD4BCW

Call to Order- Time: 1830 hours by President Craig Bigler
Pledge of Allegiance: done, **Roll Call**: done

Treasurer's Report: Chris Edwards reports that total available funds in Maintenance and Checking accounts is $2,905.68.

Trustee's Report: Elmer reported that the new antenna, initially, did not work well so it was taken down and found to have fallen apart within the fiberglass shell It was repaired and remounted on the tower. It is now working well. The new repeater on 146.655/.055 MHz at the remote site and the 146.910/.310 MHz & 444.975/449.975 MHz repeaters at the EMA center are working.

Secretary's Report: Larry Freeman reports that the grant account now has a balance of $4189.29 remaining. Larry also reported that he had applied for an extension to the grant of 4 months but has received no word on its approval or disapproval as of today's date. He further commented that the tone of the email response to his request seemed positive in that the response to him asked if 6 months would be enough.

Election of 2026 Officers: Larry nominated Bill Robinson for President and he accepted, seconded by Chris Edwards. No opposition. Voted upon and affirmed.

Joe Rougeux volunteered for the position of Vice President. It was voted upon and passed.

Chris Edwards volunteered for the position of Treasurer. It was voted upon and passed.

2026 ICARC President is Bill Robinson (KC3ZAF), Vice President is Joe Rougeux (KD3BCW), Treasurer is Chris Edwards (N3VFK).

Larry indicated that he did not want to be Secretary, but will be willing to help the new person. Craig and others emphasized the need for a Secretary to properly operate and brought up the possibility of using quality recordings and AI to help with writing minutes and record keeping of the meetings. Larry made a motion to defer the election of a Secretary to the January meeting. This was seconded and voted upon and passed.

New Board Members: Bill Robinson, Ralph Timblin (N3UDI)

Other discussions: Winter Field day discussions were started and it was suggested that three radios and three antennas be put in place. Craig pointed out that the Blue Spruce Lodge is already reserved and that "unofficial" permission was granted for overnight stays at last years WFD. Several persons indicated that they would like to participate and help. Setup will be on Jan 23, Operations will be on Jan 24 & 25 with take down occurring on Jan 25 as soon as ops cease. Craig, also spoke some on the various multipliers with a possible maximum of 33. The discussions will continue at the January meeting of ICARC.

The Secretary, indicated that he would contact Hoss's Restaurant in Indiana to set up the ICARC annual holiday dinner for sometime in January.

Good of the Order: There was some discussion of what other clubs were doing such as "trivia nets" on their repeaters. Some suggested that ICARC maybe should start such a net. Larry suggested an HF net perhaps with cw practice as a main goal. Craig suggested that we do a range test on the 146.655 MHz repeater. There was some discussion of the hard work done on the tower anchors and the signal strengths at some locations.

Adjournment-Time: Motion made and seconded. All voted to adjourn at 19:30 hours.

Program: After the formal meeting there was a very nice presentation by Paul Morris, K3VAR on using the ARRL QSL Bureau. It was very educational and lasted approximately 25 minutes.

Indiana County Amateur Radio Club
Membership Application

CURRENT DATE (M/D/Y): / / Membership Status(I,A,S,F): New_____ Ongoing_____

Individual Membership (I) — $35.00 **Associate/Student Membership (A, S) —** $20.00
Family Membership (F) – $50.00 {Two voting members per family}

***** Please complete the applicable information below: *****

Name:_____ DOB:_____ (Year Optional)

Call: _____ Class:_____ARRL:____FISTS:____ARES:___RACES:___

Other:_____ DOB:_____ (Year Optional)

Call:_____ Class:_____ ARRL:___FISTS:____ARES:____RACES:___

Other:_____ DOB:_____ (Year Optional)

Call:_____ Class:_____ARRL:___FISTS:____ARES:____RACES:___

Address: _____City:_____ St:_____Zip:_____

Phone: _____ Other Phone: _____

Email: _____Other Email: _____

Do you belong to A.R.E.S. / R.A.C.E.S. of another County, if so which one: _____

Is it OK to put your name onto the R.A.C.E.S / A.R.E.S. emergency call list? Yes___ No___

Are you a member of the ARRL? Yes_____ No_____

Signature_____ Date _____

Please return this form along with a check or money order payable to ICARC, to:

Indiana County Amateur Radio Club
Attn: Treasurer
PO Box 2020
Indiana, PA 15701

Date Received _____ Amount $_____ (Cash) (Check) (MO) Number _____

The club info & newsletter is available on our web site at: www.qsl.net/w3bmd